



## If Men Could Menstruate

A white minority of the world has spent centuries conning us into thinking that a white skin makes people superior—even though the only thing it really does is make them more subject to ultraviolet rays and to wrinkles. Male human beings have built whole cultures around the idea that penis-envy is “natural” to women—though having such an unprotected organ might be said to make men vulnerable, and the power to give birth makes womb-envy at least as logical.

In short, the characteristics of the powerful, whatever they may be, are thought to be better than the characteristics of the powerless—and logic has nothing to do with it.

What would happen, for instance, if suddenly, magically, men could menstruate and women could not?

The answer is clear—menstruation would become an enviable, boastworthy, masculine event:

Men would brag about how long and how much.

Boys would mark the onset of menses, that longed-for proof of manhood, with religious rituals and stag parties.

Congress would fund a National Institute of Dysmenorrhea to help stamp out monthly discomforts.

Sanitary supplies would be federally funded and free. (Of course, some men would still pay for the prestige of commercial brands such as John Wayne Tampons, Muhammad Ali's Rope-

a-dope Pads, Joe Namath Jock Shields—“For Those Light Bachelor Days,” and Robert “Baretta” Blake Maxi-Pads.)

Military men, right-wing politicians, and religious fundamentalists would cite menstruation (“*men*-struation”) as proof that only men could serve in the Army (“you have to give blood to take blood”), occupy political office (“can women be aggressive without that steadfast cycle governed by the planet Mars?”), be priests and ministers (“how could a woman give her blood for our sins?”), or rabbis (“without the monthly loss of impurities, women remain unclean”).

Male radicals, left-wing politicians, and mystics, however, would insist that women are equal, just different; and that any woman could enter their ranks if only she were willing to self-inflict a major wound every month (“you *must* give blood for the revolution”), recognize the preeminence of menstrual issues, or subordinate her selfness to all men in their Cycle of Enlightenment.

Street guys would brag (“I’m a three-pad man”) or answer praise from a buddy (“Man, you lookin’ *good!*”) by giving fives and saying, “Yeah, man, I’m on the rag!”

TV shows would treat the subject at length. (“Happy Days”: Richie and Potsie try to convince Fonzie that he is still “The Fonz,” though he has missed two periods in a row.) So would newspapers. (SHARK SCARE THREATENS MENSTRUATING MEN. JUDGE CITES MONTHLY STRESS IN PARDONING RAPIST.) And movies. (Newman and Redford in “Blood Brothers”!)

Men would convince women that intercourse was *more* pleasurable at “that time of the

From *Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions* by Gloria Steinem, Holt, Rinehart and Winston. Copyright © 1983 by Gloria Steinem.

month." Lesbians would be said to fear blood and therefore life itself—though probably only because they needed a good menstruating man.

Of course, male intellectuals would offer the most moral and logical arguments. How could a woman master any discipline that demanded a sense of time, space, mathematics, or measurement, for instance, without that in-built gift for measuring the cycles of the moon and planets—and thus for measuring anything at all? In the rarefied fields of philosophy and religion, could women compensate for missing the rhythm of the universe? Or for their lack of symbolic death-and-resurrection every month?

Liberal males in every field would try to be kind: the fact that "these people" have no gift for measuring life or connecting to the universe, the liberals would explain, should be punishment enough.

And how would women be trained to react? One can imagine traditional women agreeing to all these arguments with a staunch and smiling

masochism. ("The ERA would force housewives to wound themselves every month": Phyllis Schlafly. "Your husband's blood is as sacred as that of Jesus—and so sexy, too!": Marabel Morgan.) Reformers and Queen Bees would try to imitate men, and *pretend* to have a monthly cycle. All feminists would explain endlessly that men, too, needed to be liberated from the false idea of Martian aggressiveness, just as women needed to escape the bonds of menses-envy. Radical feminists would add that the oppression of the nonmenstrual was the pattern for all other oppressions. ("Vampires were our first freedom fighters!") Cultural feminists would develop a bloodless imagery in art and literature. Socialist feminists would insist that only under capitalism would men be able to monopolize menstrual blood. . . .

In fact, if men could menstruate, the power justifications could probably go on forever.

If we let them.

# MEN'S LIVES

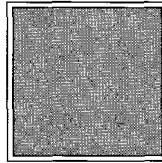
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E I G H T H   E D I T I O N

# MEN'S LIVES



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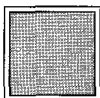
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# CONTENTS

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Preface ix

Introduction xi



## PART ONE Perspectives on Masculinities 1

- ARTICLE 1 Caveman Masculinity: Finding an Ethnicity in Evolutionary Science  
**Martha McCaughey 3**
- ARTICLE 2 The Male Privilege Checklist **Barry Deutsch 14**
- ARTICLE 3 All Men Are *Not* Created Equal: Asian Men in U.S. History  
**Yen Le Espiritu 17**
- ARTICLE 4 "Macho": Contemporary Conceptions **Alfredo Mirandé 26**



## PART TWO Boyhood 37

- ARTICLE 5 Warrior Narratives in the Kindergarten Classroom: Renegotiating the Social Contract? **Ellen Jordan and Angela Cowan 39**
- ARTICLE 6 "No Way My Boys Are Going to Be Like That!": Parents' Responses to Children's Gender Nonconformity **Emily W. Kane 52**
- ARTICLE 7 "Dude, You're a Fag": Adolescent Masculinity and the Fag Discourse  
**C. J. Pascoe 70**
- ARTICLE 8 The Act-Like-a-Man Box **Paul Kivel 83**
- ARTICLE 9 Memories of Same-Sex Attractions **Ritch C. Savin-Williams 86**
- ARTICLE 10 Making a Name for Yourself: Transgressive Acts and Gender Performance **Ann Ferguson 104**



## PART THREE Collegiate Masculinities: Privilege and Peril 117

- ARTICLE 11 Guyland: Gendering the Transition to Adulthood  
**Michael Kimmel 119**
- ARTICLE 12 The Measure of a Man: Conceptualizations of Masculinity among High-Achieving African American Male College Students  
**Shaun R. Harper 134**

- ARTICLE 13** The Fraternal Bond as a Joking Relationship: A Case Study of the Role of Sexist Jokes in Male Group Bonding  
**Peter Lyman 147**
- ARTICLE 14** Why College Men Drink: Alcohol, Adventure, and the Paradox of Masculinity **Rocco L. Capraro 157**
- ARTICLE 15** The Starbucks Intervention **Greg Bortnichak 171**



#### **PART FOUR Men and Work 175**

- ARTICLE 16** The Glass Escalator: Hidden Advantages for Men in the “Female” Professions **Christine L. Williams 177**
- ARTICLE 17** “Why Marcia You’ve Changed!”: Male Clerical Temporary Workers Doing Masculinity in a Feminized Occupation  
**Kevin D. Henson and Jackie Krasas Rogers 192**
- ARTICLE 18** Sexual Harassment and Masculinity: The Power and Meaning of “Girl Watching” **Beth A. Quinn 208**
- ARTICLE 19** Just One of the Guys?: How Transmen Make Gender Visible at Work  
**Kristen Schilt 221**



#### **PART FIVE Men and Health 241**

- ARTICLE 20** Masculinities and Men’s Health: Moving toward Post-Superman Era Prevention **Don Sabo 243**
- ARTICLE 21** Old Gay Men’s Bodies and Masculinities **Kathleen F. Slevin and Thomas J. Linneman 261**
- ARTICLE 22** If Men Could Menstruate **Gloria Steinem 280**
- ARTICLE 23** Fixing Broken Masculinity: Viagra as a Technology for the Production of Gender and Sexuality **Meika Loe 282**
- ARTICLE 24** It Takes Balls: Lance Armstrong and the Triumph of American Masculinity **Monica Casper and Lisa Jean Moore 289**



#### **PART SIX Men in Relationships 301**

- ARTICLE 25** “I’m Not Friends the Way She’s Friends”: Ideological and Behavioral Constructions of Masculinity in Men’s Friendships  
**Karen Walker 303**
- ARTICLE 26** The Politics of Gay Men’s Friendships **Peter M. Nardi 316**

- ARTICLE 27** The Girl Hunt: Urban Nightlife and the Performance of Masculinity as Collective Activity **David Grazian 320**
- ARTICLE 28** Gender and the Meanings of Adolescent Romantic Relationships: A Focus on Boys **Peggy C. Giordano, Monica A. Longmore, and Wendy D. Manning 338**



## **PART SEVEN Male Sexualities 369**

- ARTICLE 29** Becoming 100 Percent Straight **Michael A. Messner 371**
- ARTICLE 30** The Heterosexual Questionnaire **M. Rochlin 377**
- ARTICLE 31** A Pornographic World [What Is Normal?] **Robert Jensen 378**
- ARTICLE 32** They Don't Want to Cruise Your Type: Gay Men of Color and the Racial Politics of Exclusion **Chong-suk Han 384**
- ARTICLE 33** Fantasy Islands: Exploring the Demand for Sex Tourism **Julia O'Connell Davidson and Jacqueline Sanchez Taylor 397**



## **PART EIGHT Men in Families 411**

- ARTICLE 34** Strategies Men Use to Resist **Francine M. Deutch 413**
- ARTICLE 35** Ethnicity, Race, and Difference: A Comparison of White, Black, and Hispanic Men's Household Labor Time **Anne Shelton and Daphne John 420**
- ARTICLE 36** Fathering: Paradoxes, Contradictions, and Dilemmas **Scott Coltrane 432**
- ARTICLE 37** Cruising to Familyland: Gay Hypergamy and Rainbow Kinship **Judith Stacey 450**



## **PART NINE Masculinities in the Media and Popular Culture 463**

- ARTICLE 38** The Male Consumer as Loser: Beer and Liquor Ads in Mega Sports Media Events **Michael A. Messner and Jeffrey Montez de Oca 465**
- ARTICLE 39** When in Rome: Heterosexism, Homophobia, and Sports Talk Radio **David Nylund 479**
- ARTICLE 40** Retrofitting Frontier Masculinity for Alaska's War against Wolves **Sine Anahita and Tamara L. Mix 504**



- ARTICLE 41** "A Walking Open Wound": Emo Rock and the "Crisis" of Masculinity in America **Sarah F. Williams 521**



**PART TEN Violence and Masculinities 533**

- ARTICLE 42** Athlete Aggression on the Rink and off the Ice: Athlete Violence and Aggression in Hockey and Interpersonal Relationships  
**Nick T. Pappas, Patrick C. McKenry, and Beth Skilken Catlett 535**
- ARTICLE 43** Culture, Gender, and Violence: "We Are Not Women"  
**James Gilligan 551**
- ARTICLE 44** Men on Rape **Tim Beneke 559**
- ARTICLE 45** Wielding Masculinity inside Abu Ghraib: Making Feminist Sense of an American Military Scandal **Cynthia Enloe 565**



**PART ELEVEN Men, Movements, and the Future 573**

- ARTICLE 46** The Role of Men and Boys in Achieving Gender Equality  
**United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, Forty-Eighth Session, March 1-12, 2004 575**
- ARTICLE 47** More Than a Few Good Men **Jackson Katz 579**
- ARTICLE 48** New Black Man **Mark Anthony Neal 591**
- ARTICLE 49** "I Used to Think Women Were Weak": Orthodox Masculinity, Gender Segregation, and Sport **Eric Anderson 596**
- ARTICLE 50** Unraveling the Gender Knot **Allan Johnson 613**

Contributors **623**